

# Bringing Marxism Back In?

## On Colonial Capitalism and Liberalism

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My review is divided into three parts: (1) my questions about Ince's argument; (2) potential contexts that might be suitable to situate the book; and (3) its original contributions.

### 1. Questions

Nowadays, many historians of political, economic, and social thought who study the early modern era are trying to elucidate aspects of British imperialism. There are many writings on this theme. When intellectual historians focus on British imperialism, they utilize various approaches, ranging from cultural studies, postcolonial studies and contextualism to global intellectual history. However, each historical approach has its own merits and demerits. Many historians have abandoned the Marxist approach and, in doing so, they have lost their way of linking ideas to historical processes, especially to the grand, long-term narratives of economic history. Moreover, they have scarcely provided an alternative approach to recovering a similar association of ideas with economic history. This point is important when one considers Ince's *Colonial Capitalism and the Dilemmas of Liberalism*. The book tries to connect past ideas with history on a grand scale; then, while rejecting the outdated Marxist approach, it adopts a modernized Marxism appropriate for the contemporary standard of historical research. This book focuses on the dilemmas of liberalism; specifically, on how the colonialism of the British Empire was connected to and compatible with liberalism. To answer this question, Ince analyses the works of John Locke, Edmund Burke, and Edward Gibbon Wakefield.

The book is inspiring because it elucidates the stance of political economists on the relationship between liberalism and imperialism. There have been many studies conducted to understand imperialism and political economy. Donald Winch's *Classical Political Economy and Colonies* (1965)<sup>1</sup> outlines how classical political economists including Adam Smith, Jeremy Bentham, the Ricardian scholars, and Wakefield considered colonies. Winch saw that anti-imperialism was a typical stance of classical political economists. However, as Ince's book clarifies, political economists did not oppose British imperialism in all cases. Rather, they connected liberalism with imperialism.

In analysing texts, Ince focuses on the impact of imperialism on capitalism. Eric Williams argued that slavery was the source of Europe's accumulation of capital.<sup>2</sup> Williams's thesis has been severely criticized by historians, who have argued that slavery was not so much beneficial for

Europe as it was for the rise of capitalism. Here, one might argue whether Ince's book could be considered as revitalizing Williams's thesis. Although this book does not mainly discuss Williams's thesis, it does involve it. Especially concerning how Europe accumulated its capital through colonization, the question is still worth discussing. Although this book and Williams's thesis differ in approach and in the area of study (the former focuses on the history of political and economic thought, whereas the latter focuses on the proper processes of history), the book could have the power to revitalize Williams's thesis.

This book is also unique in the sense that in analyzing the texts, it uses Marxist terminology (i.e. primitive accumulation of capital). A contextualist might consider the usage of this terminology as anachronistic. The contextual approach (adopted by Quentin Skinner, J. G. A. Pocock, and so on) has criticized any approach that brought later thought into textual analysis. A contextualist focuses on what the author of a text intends in writing or publishing it. In this regard especially, this approach has criticized the Marxist approach because it brings into a text later concepts which the original authors do not know about or intend to use. For instance, Macpherson's possessive individualism was severely criticized because Locke did not know about capitalistic individualism.

Ince's book seems to recognize this criticism. Thus, he adopted what I may call 'intentional anachronism' to enrich his textual analysis. Certainly, this book could have been written without using Marxist terminology. However, to focus on the socioeconomic implications of the texts, the book dares to use it.

One may wonder, if a contextualist criticizes a book as an 'anachronism,' or posits that there was no such Marxist terminology and intention in the works of early modern writers such as Locke, how would the author reply? A contextual approach contributes to relatively objective study of intellectual history because almost nobody can deny the surrounding facts of a thinker. However, because the contextual approach denies the universality of ideas through time, it can be seen as denying the contemporary importance of past ideas over time. By using Marxist terminology, the book challenges this approach and revitalizes the present-day significance of past ideas. Moreover, the contextual approach is reluctant to use the terms of today. Past thinkers had their own terms and usage of words, both of which the contextualists try to respect. Again, in using Marxist terminology, the book challenges this methodology.

## II. Potential Contexts

I would like to point out potential contexts that could enrich the book further. First, many scholars have linked imperialism with the economy. Vladimir Lenin's *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1917) regarded imperialism as the advanced, monopolistic stage of capitalism wherein states fight each other over colonies because, due to a surplus of production, the advanced states require markets for their goods.<sup>3</sup> Inspired by Lenin, some Japanese scholars before World War II connected imperialism with liberalism. In 1907, colonial studies became an official field of study at

Japanese universities. Tadao Yanaihara (1893–1961), a professor at Tokyo Imperial University, criticized the management of Japanese colonies and advocated liberal self-government of colonies, although he did not oppose imperialism itself. Thus, Ince's claim was applicable not only for Britain but also for other countries in which imperialism was moving forward.

Second, some Japanese scholars were already referring to 'primitive accumulation of capital' to denote the mercantilist stage of political economy. Inspired by Max Weber and Lenin, Hisao Otsuka (1907–1996) thought that the primitive accumulation of capital was typical for seventeenth-century Britain, where absolute government and merchants struggled to accumulate capital via enclosure. Influenced by Otsuka, Noboru Kobayashi (1916–2010) explored how mercantile economists in the seventeenth century advocated imperialism.

Chapter I of Ince's book concerns John Locke. As I examined in my book *Commerce and Strangers in Adam Smith* (2018), Smith was influenced by travel literature with regard to the indigenous people in North America.<sup>4</sup> As I argued there (Chap. II), after the European discovery of the Americas, many European people went there, and some of them wrote travel books. In the seventeenth century, some British people went to America to establish colonies. Sometimes, the colonists fought against the American Indians and published travel books that depicted the American Indians as cruel; others depicted them as simple and peaceful. However, much seventeenth-century literature on them was based only on hearsay. However, as their population decreased rapidly, and the French competed with the British, hostility toward the Indians decreased. Because Locke was said to read the travel books, he understood that North America was not a vacant land. If he affirmed the dispossession of the American land, he might have intentionally ignored this fact. In this way, the contextual approach might be useful for understanding the meaning of a text.

Further, Ince's book researches the case of India. As I argued in my book (Chap. II), the problem on the management of India was debated harshly. In the 1760s, British people argued whether or not the East India Company should manage India. Both advocates and critics of the East India Company did not think that the Company and Britain should abandon Bengal. However, both shared the view that at least some officers there were oppressing the indigenous people of Bengal. Adam Smith participated in the debate as to whether the Company was sovereign in India. He and other travel writers considered it as sovereign. However, unlike the travel writers, Smith insisted on the radical argument that to be a sovereign was incompatible with being a merchant. This argument can be called radical because, whereas the other writers thought Britain should maintain its dominion over Bengal, Smith required the abandonment of such imperialistic enterprises. Unlike Smith, some authors who criticized the cruel deeds of the East India Company affirmed Britain's dominion over India. If so, Burke's position that liberalism was mixed with imperialism was not exceptional, but one of the typical reactions to the Indian affairs.

### III. Contributions of the Book

This book is suggestive as an example of global intellectual history. David Armitage and other scholars (e.g. Armitage, *The Declaration of Independence: A Global History* (2007) and Armitage, *Foundations of Modern International Thought* (2012)) have insisted on global intellectual history as an approach of intellectual history.<sup>5</sup> They argue that research could be done in view of global interaction. However, how to move forward presents some difficulty. Ince's book is instructive because it explains how international socioeconomic conditions were linked with political economy.

This point is also important in considering present political or economic issues such as Brexit. Brexit is about to happen in a globalized world where people immigrate and emigrate internationally and capitalists shift their money internationally. In addition, companies can move their capital, factories, and companies all over the world. Local economies are damaged because, under globalization, the most efficient companies are the fittest to survive. Further, global companies can employ immigrant workers with lower wages. Therefore, globalization is linked with the mainstream economists who affirm the optimal allocation of resources. They are 'liberal' in the sense that they cherish individual liberty. However, this claim could be linked with the affirmation of a global shift of capital and people. Such a mixture of liberalism and globalism could be seen as a variant on or a modified version of the mixture of liberalism and imperialism. Indeed, imperialism is a kind of rendition of globalization. Although globalism currently opposes imperialism, it is worth researching how imperialism has been transformed into globalism. To do so requires researching how economists in the twentieth century considered globalization. Ince's book is essential for moving this research forward.

### Notes

1. Winch (1965).
2. Williams (1944).
3. Lenin (1917/1939).
4. Nohara (2018).
5. Armitage (2007); Armitage (2012).

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受稿2019年11月5日／掲載決定2019年11月18日